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TEN YEARS OF UN ACTION ON THE QUESTION OF EAST TIMOR

The U.N. has been central to the negotiations concerning the question of East Timor since the conflict began. The General Assembly, the Security Council, the Special Committee on Decolonization and the Commission on Human Rights are U.N. bodies which have dealt with the question of East Timor.

General Assembly.

On 12 December 1975, only five days after the Indonesian invasion, the G.A. adopted a resolution responding to the situation in East Timor. Resolution 3485(XXX) recognized Portugal as the administering power of the territory, it "strongly deplored" the military intervention of Indonesian armed forces and called upon Indonesia "to desist from further violations of the territorial integrity of Portuguese Timor and to withdraw without delay its armed forces from the Territory in order to enable the people of the Territory freely to exercise their right to self-determination." Resolution 3485 (XXX) was strongly supported, the vote was 72-10-43.

From 1975 to 1982 the General Assembly's Fourth Committee continued to adopt yearly resolutions addressing the "Question of East Timor". Each year the language of the resolutions became less condemnatory of Indonesia and support for the resolutions weakened. The resolution adopted in 1982 (37/30) no longer calls for Indonesia to withdraw from East Timor. It focuses on the negotiation process and requests that the Secretary-General initiate consultations with parties concerned "with a view to exploring avenues for achieving a comprehensive settlement of the problem and to report thereon to the Assembly at its thirty-eighth session." Support for resolution 37/30 was very weak, the vote was 50-46-50.

In 1983 and 1984 discussion on the question of East Timor has been postponed by the General Assembly for two main reasons. First, it has been difficult to establish the terms of the consultations by the Secretary-General, as stated in resolution 37/30, because Indonesia refuses to recognize the international nature of the conflict. Negotiations have also been criticized because the Secretary-General has not included FRETILIN! Second, there is uncertainty about the actual living conditions in East Timor because of Indonesia's strict control of information concerning the territory.

In September 1985 the General Committee of the 40th General Assembly will once again consider whether the item on the "Question of East Timor" should be included in the agenda.

The Security Council.

The Security Council convened on 12 December 1975, five days after the Indonesian invasion, to address the question of East Timor. Resolution 385 (1975), adopted unanimously on December 22, supported General Assembly resolution 3485(XXX) in calling upon Indonesia to withdraw its forces without delay from East Timor. Four months later, on 22 April 1976, the Security Council adopted another resolution on the question of East Timor, 389(1976). This resolution is very similar to the previous one but the U.S. and Japan abstained. The Security Council has not discussed the question of East Timor since 1976 even though East Timor remains on its agenda.

Special Committee on Decolonization.

The Special Committee on Decolonization has considered the question of East Timor every year since 1975 but has not adopted any resolutions on the issue. In the course of the discussions representatives from FRETILIN, Amnesty International, the Minority Rights Group and the International League for Human Rights, among other petitioners, have made statements to the Committee on this question, addressing the abuses that Indonesia has inflicted on the people of East Timor and the illegality of its presence in the territory.

In 1976, 1977 and 1978, the General Assembly requested that the Special Committee dispatch a visiting mission to the territory "with a view to the full and speedy implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to the Colonial Countries and Peoples." Yet due to various international pressures the Special Committee has not carried out this request.

Commission on Human Rights.

In 1982, for the first time, the Sub-Commission on the Prevention of Discrimination and the Protection of Minorities considered the question of East Timor and recommended that the Commission adopt a resolution (1982/20) regarding human rights violations in the territory. In its next meeting the Commission adopted the recommended resolution (1983/8), the only public statement made by the Commission on this issue. The Sub-Commission also adopted resolutions on East Timor in 1983 and 1984.

The Commission discussed Indonesia's human rights record (in relation to East Timor) in 1983 and 1984 under confidential procedure 1503(XLVIII), which considers human rights violations in different countries. In March 1985 the Commission removed Indonesia from the list of countries being considered under this procedure, implying that the Commission no longer considers Indonesia to be a gross violator of human rights.

Annually since 1981 the Commission's Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances has considered the situation in East Timor in regard to many prisoners and other individuals who have disappeared in the territory.

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PROBLEMS WITH INTERNATIONAL ACTION

Although Indonesia continues to occupy East Timor illegally and to engage in violations of human rights, most governments give tacit support to the Indonesian occupation. Here are the positions of the different parties which have influence on the situation in East Timor.

Indonesia Indonesia argues that the situation in East TImor is an internal affair and does not concern the UN. Indonesia has effectively lobbied the international community using its economic influence, to discourage countries from condemning its action in East Timor. Indonesia has the support of the ASEAN countries.

Portugal Although Portugal continues to be the UN recognised administering power of East Timor, it has no direct political, military or econiomic leverage against Indonesia. Portugal has made some efforts in negotiating a solution of the conflict in East Timor.

Australia As East Timor's nearest neighbour, Australia could play an important role in the negotiations for a settlement of the situation in East Timor. Yet, due to its security interests and its alignment with the West, Australia does not condem Indonesia for its actions in East Timor. In 1978, Australia recognised Indonesia's incorporation of East Timor and now supports Indonesia's position in the UN.

United States and Western Allies Although Indonesia is one of the least developed countries in South East Asia it has great economic potential due to an abundance of natural resources which includes oil. For these reasons, Indonesia has become an important ally to Western countries. Its strategic geographical position, lying beween the Pacific and Indian Oceans and controlling the best sea channels from East to West, has influenced Western countries to support its position towards East Timor. The US, Australia, France and the UK have all increased military aid to Indonesia since the 1975 invasion while Canada, Japan and the Netherlands have increased their foreign aid. While most Western European countries and their allies have abstained in UN resolutions concerning this issue, the US has voted against them.

Sao Tome and Principe, Angola, Mozambique, Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau, Vanatu and Zimbabwe among others are Non-Aligned countries which have supported the continued efforts towards the self-determination of East Timor. They recognise FRETILIN as the representative of the people of the territory and speak on its behalf at the UN.

FRETILIN Although many FRETILIN leaders have died during the last ten years of war, they continue to have a strong resistance movement to the Indonesian occupation. In the International arena, they call for a cessation of hostilities in the territory, a withdrawal of Indonesian troops with a parallel replacement by an international police force, a UN-led interim administration and a referendum on the future of East Timor.